

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTIAGO 2774

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EO 11652: XGDS-4

TAGS: CI, PINS, PINR

SUBJ: HUMAN RIGHTS - DAWSON ISLAND PRISONERS

REF: SANTIAGO 2361

1. SUMMARY. FAMILY OF ORLANDO LETELIER REPORTS THAT HE AND OTHER HIGH-LEVEL LEADERS OF ALLENDE GOVERNMENT WERE MALTREATED AND TORTURED IN LAST WEEKS BEFORE LEAVING DAWSON ISLAND FOR TRANSFER TO SANTIAGO IN EARLY MAY. MRS LETELIER ASKED THAT I INTERCEDE WITH CHILEAN AUTHORITIES. END SUMMARY.

2. FAMILY OF FORMER AMB TO U.S., FON MIN AND MIN DEFENSE ORLANDO LETELIER WERE PERMITTED SHORT VISIT TO LETELIER AT CHILEAN AIR FORCE ACADEMY IN SANTIAGO ON EVENING MAY 18. MRS. LETELIER HAS REPORTED TO EMBOFFS THAT SHE FOUND LETELIER IN "SHOCKING- PHYSICAL AND MENTAL STATE, IN SHARP CONTRAST TO HIS CONDITION WHEN LAST SEEN IN JANUARY. LETELIER APPEARED GAUNT, PHYSICALLY WEAK AND IN DISTURBED EMOTIONAL STATE. HE TOLD FAMILY HE AND OTHER PRISONERS HAD SUFFERED "HELL" ON DAWSON DURING LAST MONTH OR SIX WEEKS BEFORE TRANSFER TO SANTIAGO ABOUT MAY 8. MENTIONED SEVERE LACK OF FOOD, DEPRIVATION OF SLEEP, FORCED MARCHES, BRUTAL AND CONTINUOUS HARASSMENT, AND TORTURE BY "ELECTRIC CURRENT." WHILE HE AND OTHERS HAVE NOT RPT NOT BEEN MISTREATED SINCE DEPARTURE DAWSON, THEY ARE CONVINCED (ON WHAT BASIS IT IS NOT CLEAR) THAT THEY WILL BE TORTURED AGAIN SOON AND WILL BE JAILED FOR 10 YEARS AFTER EXPECTED TRIALS.

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3. MALTREATMENT ON DAWSON BEGAN, PERHAPS ONLY COINCIDENTALLY,

WITH ASSIGNMENT OF NEW CAMP COMMANDER. AT ABOUT SAME TIME, GOC ANNOUNCED IT WAS CLOSING CAMP TO OUTSIDE VISITORS, WITHOUT GIVING ANY REASONS.

4. MRS. LETELIER STATES THAT AT LEAST FIVE OTHER WIVES OF DE-TAINEES HAVE REPORTED SIMILAR EXPERIENCES WITH THEIR HUSBANDS. NO ONE IS ABLE TO EXPLAIN THIS APPARENT DEPARTURE FROM PREVIOUS PRACTICE OF RELATIVELY GOOD TREATMENT FOR DAWSON PRISONERS BUT FAMILY SPECULATES IT MAY HAVE BEEN ATTEMPT "SOFTEN UP" PRISONERS BEFORE TRANSFER FOR INTERROGATION AND TRIAL IN SANTIAGO. GOC OFFICIALS FROM JUNTA MEMBER ADM MERINO DOWN HAVE IN RECENT WEEKS BEEN WILLING RECEIVE LETELIER AND OTHER PRISONER FAMILY MEMBERS AND ALL INDICATIONS TO FAMILIES (AND EMBASSY) HAD BEEN THAT PRISONERS WERE BEING CORRECTLY TREATED AND MIGHT AT LEAST IN SOME INSTANCES ENJOY A DEGREE OF LENIENCY IN DISPOSING OF CASES.

5. MRS. LETELIER HAD APPOINTMENT MAY 21 TO SEE AIR FORCE COLONEL IN CHARGE PRISONERS, AT WHICH TIME SHE PLANNED ASK TO HAVE LETELIER EXAMINED BY DOCTOR AND POSSIBLY GIVEN TRAQUILIZERS "TO HELP HIM SLEEP." SHE DOES NOT PLAN PROTEST TORTURE OR SEEK PUBLICITY, AS SHE AND LAWYER CONSIDER THIS WOULD BE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE. SHE AND LAWYER WERE TO HAVE LUNCHEON MAY 21 WITH RAMSEY CLARK AND JUDGE WILLIAM BOOTH OF COMMITTEE FOR FAIR TRIAL OF CHILEAN POLITICAL PRISONERS, WHO ARRIVED MAY 20 IN SANTIAGO. THEY PLANNED TO MENTION TO CLARK AND BOOTH ONLY CONCERN OVER "PHYSICAL AND MENTAL DETERIORATION" OF LETELIER. MRS. LETELIER SPECIFICALLY ASKED THAT I BE INFORMED OF SITUATION AND THAT I INTERCEDE WITH GOC ON BEHALF OF PRISONERS.

7. COMMENT. WHILE ALLOWANCE MUST BE MADE FOR EMOTIONAL STRAIN MRS. LETELIER IS UNDERGOING, IT IS CERTAINLY POSSIBLE THAT FOR SOME REASON DAWSON ISLAND PRISONERS HAVE BEEN MORE HARSHLY TREATED IN RECENT WEEKS. WE DO NOT KNOW EXTENT TO WHICH THEY HAVE BEEN INTERROGATED DURING THAT PERIOD, HOW MUCH MORE INTERROGATION THEY STILL FACE, WHEN CHARGES AGAINST THEM WILL BE DISCLOSED, AND HOW MUCH TIME ATTORNEYS WILL BE GIVEN TO PREPARE DEFENSE. AS AND WHEN WE DISCREETLY CAN, WE WILL SEEK ELUCIDATION ON THESE MATTERS.

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8. I DO NOT BELIEVE I SHOULD MAKE ANY SPECIAL DEMARCHE TO GOC RE LETELIER'S CONDITION AT THIS TIME, IF ONLY BECAUSE IT WOULD IMMEDIATELY PRODUCE SUSPICION ON PART OF GOVERNMENT THAT WE HAD BEEN INFORMED OF LETELIER'S CONDITION, WITH RESULTING POSSIBLE HARM TO HIS WIFE AND FAMILY. IF MRS. LETELIER AND HER ATTORNEY ARE CORRECT AS TO DETERIORATED STATE OF PRISONERS, THE NEWS WILL SOONER OR LATER GET ABOUT IN SANTIAGO, AND WE WILL

HAVE BETTER BASIS FOR THE KIND OF PRIVATE REPRESENTATIONS WE HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN MAKING. AT THAT STAGE, THERE WOULD BE SOME POINT IN ADDING OUR COMMENT TO THOSE OF OTHERS.

9. BEFORE I LEAVE FOR U.S. ON JUNE 5, I WILL HAVE A NUMBER OF GENERAL DISCUSSION WITH GOC OFFICIALS ON OUR BILATERAL PROBLEMS, AND WILL AT THAT TIME OF COURSE EXPRESS AN INTEREST IN THE DAWSON ISLAND PRISONERS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF TRYING THEM FAIRLY AND DETERMINING THEIR FATES ON A HUMANE RATHER THAN A VINDICTIVE BASIS. TRUST YOU AGREE THIS WOULD BE MOST EFFECTIVE PROCEDURE OPEN TO US.

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